



CANBERRA COMMUNITY CLUBS
LAUNCH EVENT, CANBERRA BURNS CLUB

CHAIRMAN'S SPEECH

Chief Minister, Andrew Barr, ladies and gentlemen.

A very warm welcome to the Canberra Burns Club and to the launch today of Canberra Community Clubs, a new representative and advocacy body for Canberra's club industry.

I want to start by particularly thanking the Chief Minister, on behalf of the Board of Canberra Community Clubs, for accepting our invitation to launch this new organisation today.

We see your attendance as a very important signal to Clubs in Canberra that the Government welcomes the establishment of the new body and is eager to work with us on the policy agenda the Government has laid out.

And from a personal point of view, I want to thank you Andrew for agreeing to a launch event in my own Club - the Canberra Burns Club – and for the support you have given this Club now over a number of years. Very much appreciated.

I believe today is an exciting and important one for Canberra's community clubs. A day that marks the beginning of a fresh, new era.

An era that will be characterised by a quality relationship with Government based on trust, collaboration, constructive dialogue and a shared commitment to seeking outcomes which work for all parties.

An era where the industry body focusses on the important industry issues, not politics.

An era where the industry body seeks to work collaboratively and constructively across the entire political system, with other advocacy groups, with the media, with the broader ACT business community, and with those many community groups in Canberra that rely on clubs as supporters and partners.

The emergence of this new group stems from a discontent many of us in the Club community have felt over recent years about the way the Club industry body has conducted its relationship with Government and the way it has chosen to prosecute our



issues of concern. This discontent led us to decide recently that it was time to start again and build a new industry body to represent the sector. A body that looks different, operates differently, thinks differently, and is underpinned by a culture of listening and working towards shared solutions. That body is Canberra Community Clubs.

And I am proud to say that our foundation members have seen fit to elect me as their Chairman. My promise to them - and to any other Clubs that may choose to join us after today - is that I will bring to this role all the energy, passion and commitment that I can muster.

I am however a relative newcomer to this industry. I have never worked in the industry, and I have only been on the Board of the Burns Club for 5 years, the last 2 years as President. Some may suggest this is not the ideal CV for someone taking on the position of Chairman of an advocacy body for the club industry.

I disagree.

Being a newcomer means my thinking and views are not burdened or tainted by legacy issues and legacy positions. I don't come to this role with long established, built in views on the industry's role, its entitlements, its structure or what might constitute the appropriate Club operational model. I'm not wedded to long standing industry positions on the important policy issues we need to grapple with. Rather, I come with fresh eyes, an open mind, and experience gained and lessons learnt from working in other industries.

And I have spent my professional career working in advocacy, government relations and stakeholder management roles. Roles where you quickly learn that the quality of the relationships, and listening authentically to one another's view, are fundamental to achieving good outcomes.

The most significant thing that has struck me since I have become involved in the club industry is that, for the most part, it resists change. I see an industry that seems to - by and large - want to hold on to a business model, a culture and a philosophy that worked well 10 or more ago.

That approach won't cut it in today's world – to resist change simply means a slow death.

Industries all around us are now being significantly disrupted and forced to re-invent themselves, both in structure and attitude. The mix of rapid changes in technology, changing consumer demands, the advent of new ways to consume entertainment, changing community values, changing demographics - and in particular the growth in millennials - are all factors driving industry disruption at an unprecedented rate.



We can all very quickly think of industries currently being disrupted on a global scale. The taxi industry, motels, retailers, media, financial services – and the list goes on. The once successful business models in these industry sectors are now either destroyed or under significant threat.

The Club industry is no different. We are just as vulnerable as any other industry to these powerful forces of change. The industry must acknowledge and understand these pressures and seek to come to grips with the implications and how it might respond.

So as an industry we need to be thinking outside the traditional model, be innovative, be imaginative, and be prepared to take a risk or two. And to help manage this change and ideally grasp the opportunities that change can often bring, we must also be committed to working collaboratively with Governments, other advocacy bodies, the media and other industries – many of whom we may have traditionally viewed as club competitors. As an industry, we need to evolve if we are to remain contemporary and sustainable.

This is the type of thinking, philosophy and culture that Canberra Community Clubs is built on.

In practice what does this mean? How will Canberra Community Clubs be different from those that have preceded it or be different from club advocacy bodies in other jurisdictions?

At a structural level, the composition of our Board is very deliberately diverse. We have two independent directors – Andy Gregory, a Founding Director of the successful local company Yellow Edge, and Carrie Leeson, CEO of Lifeline. Of the other five positions available on the Board they must be a mix of individual Club Board representatives and Club CEOs. CEOs quite naturally bring an expertise on Club operational issues, whilst Club Board members typically bring a broader and quite different skill set.

This Board structure will allow us to capture a diversity of views, expertise, experience and contacts which will help us drive innovation and fresh thinking in our leadership.

Apart from the Board structure, Canberra Community Clubs will be different in at least five other key ways.

Let me briefly outline them.

Firstly, we embrace and want to play our part in helping the Government achieve its vision for this great city of ours. We genuinely believe Canberra can become one of the world's most liveable cities, characterised by a strong, diverse economy, a commitment to social inclusion and environmental sustainability, a healthy and vibrant community sector, and a commitment to preserving and promoting our cultural and ethnic diversity. A strong, sustainable Club sector can and should be an important contributor to these outcomes.



Secondly, we take the issue of harm minimisation seriously. As an industry, we must be a bigger part of the solution to this problem.

Our culture at Canberra Community Clubs is that we care about our members and we want to help and protect members who may be at risk. Governments and the community in general have also made it clear that this issue is important and one that we collectively need to address.

But to address the issue effectively will require a collaborative effort. It will require the industry working closely with Government, with other organisations in the broader gambling sector – including online which is where the most rapid growth is occurring - and perhaps most important of all it will require us to work with those people and organisations who are expert in the field of harm minimisation. People with the skills, experience and insights who can guide and advise us on what at a club level we can do to genuinely help address the issue. And in this context and to underscore the commitment of Canberra Community Clubs to this issue, I am delighted that Carrie Leeson, CEO of Lifeline Canberra, has accepted an invitation to join our Board.

Just one other point in relation to the harm minimisation issue. An important principle which needs to be applied here - and indeed applied to all the work we do - is that we must embrace a strong evidence based approach. Before we pursue initiatives which at first blush seem like they might be effective or are a logical response to the problem, we must first dig deeper and look for any evidence in other jurisdictions, including internationally, about impact and effectiveness. We need to apply genuine rigour to our policy analysis and discussions – because we want to be as confident as we can that whatever we implement will have a material impact on the problem.

A third point of difference is that our starting point on new investment proposals in Canberra is to welcome them. Investment which creates new jobs, adds to the diversity and attraction of our city, and grows the economic pie that we call “Canberra” can generate benefits for all of us. Canberra Community Clubs will take a big picture, economic impact view of new investment and, where there are any particular issues of concern, we will work through them with the Government, the potential investor and any other relevant stakeholders.

My fourth point – and of particular importance to me as President of the Burns Club – is that we want to ensure Canberra has a sustainable mix of large, medium and small clubs.

I stand here as president of the Canberra Burns Club. Canberra’s oldest club. Established in 1924 and so turning 93 this October. No much younger than our city.

Along the journey of those 93 years we have had a couple of near death experiences, but on each occasion, we have reinvented ourselves and, whilst there are still considerable challenges, the business is currently in reasonable shape.



The real achievement however is not so much that we survived, but rather that our survival has meant we can remain faithful to our constitution and the dreams of our founding fathers which is to preserve and promote Scottish culture. Scottish music, sport, dance, the arts, and of course the poetry of the famous bard, Robert Burns. Without this club, much of that tradition and culture would die in Canberra. Our Club is just one example of a small club whose contribution to Canberra is unique and important. There are many other small clubs in this town with similar stories and similar reasons for needing to exist. Yet sadly we have lost too many small and medium Clubs over the years – at least 15 Clubs in the last 20 years. In a city that is deservedly proud of its multiculturalism, its embrace of diversity and social inclusion – we must try harder, collectively, to stop this trend.

Aside from the cultural benefits of diversity, having a mix of big and small groups in any industry is prudent and healthy – it delivers different customer experiences, provides people with options, and promotes competition. The club sector is no different.

And the fifth and final thing you will see different about us is that we view Government as a partner that we want to collaborate with to achieve what I believe are a number of shared goals – and the shared goals is something which I think gets lost in the political noise and associated commentary that seems to follow this industry.

We both value clubs and what they bring to our community; we both agree the club business model must change; we both want to see a reduction in problem gambling; we both want to encourage new investment in this city; we both want a diverse and healthy club sector; and we both want to make Canberra one of the world's most liveable cities.

Having shared vision and goals is a great starting point for collaboration, discussion and debate. As any professional negotiator would tell you - the best point to start a negotiation is on the areas of agreement. It helps build goodwill, trust and momentum which in turn can significantly improve the ability of both parties to deal successfully with the more complex and contentious issues which inevitably arise.

In conclusion, Canberra Community Clubs will bring a fresh, new and innovative approach to dealing with the issues of the day, and we look forward with considerable enthusiasm to working with the Government, the Legislative Assembly, and the range of other business and community stakeholders on the challenges that lie before us.

Athol Chalmers
Chair
Canberra Community Clubs
19 May 2017